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RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0931  
RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 8824  
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 5664  
RUESLE/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 8227  
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 4846  
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000084

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: PUBLIC OPINION POLLING ON PRESIDENT CHEN'S NEW  
YEARS ADDRESS

REF: A. TAIPEI 53

[1](#)B. TAIPEI 9

[1](#)C. TAIPEI 8

[1](#)D. TAIPEI 7

Classified By: AIT Deputy Director David Keegan, Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: President Chen's approval rating rose very slightly after his controversial New Years address but remains extremely low, 23 percent, according to a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) internal public opinion poll. Nonetheless, Chen's speech struck a responsive chord within the DPP as DPP and other polling indicates that more DPP supporters now approve than disapprove of both the speech and Chen Shui-bian personally. Chen's address both reflects and may also cause further division of public opinion along party lines over cross-Straits policy, with DPP supporters endorsing the tightening of cross-Straits economic ties and Kuomintang (KMT) supporters favoring greater opening. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) DPP polling director Wu Hsiang-jung told AIT that, while a majority of the public approved of President Chen's statements on a number of the specific issues he raised in his New Years Day address, including active management of cross-Straits relations and a new constitution, only 30 percent of the public approved the speech as a whole, according to polling conducted by the DPP for internal reference. Wu attributed public dissatisfaction with the overall content of the speech as due to two factors: Chen Shui-bian's low approval rating; and his failure to address a number of important issues such as developing the economy and reducing cross-Straits tensions. DPP polling shows that Chen's low approval rating rose slightly after the New Years Day address, from 19 to 23 percent. The same polling indicates that more pan-Green supporters approved than disapproved the president's speech, Wu added.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Polling by the pro-Blue TVBS television station also shows a slight rise in President Chen's overall approval rating (from 10 to 13 percent) following his New Years address resulting entirely from an increase in approval of Chen by pan-Green supporters. Among DPP respondents Chen had a 35 percent approval and 45 percent disapproval rating on December 15 following the party's defeat in local elections, with his approval rating rising to 47 percent and his

disapproval decreasing to 33 percent of DPP supporters on January 2 after his New Years address.

¶4. (SBU) Public opinion polls by the pro-Blue TVBS and the more balanced ERA television station both suggest a divergence in pan-Blue and pan-Green views of Chen's statements on cross-Straits relations. In response to an ERA TV question, 67 percent of the pan-Green respondents agreed with Chen's view that it is better not to open cross-Straits economic relations if they cannot be managed, while only 16 percent of the pan-Blue supporters agreed and 76 percent disagreed. TVBS polling showed a similar result, with 59 percent of DPP supporters agreeing with Chen's new policy of "active management, effective opening," while only 13 percent of KMT supporters agreed with Chen's new formulation and 63 percent disagreed.

¶5. (SBU) The pro-Green Taiwan Thinktank held a press conference on January 8 to publicize the results of its public opinion poll, which focused on views of cross-Straits issues following Chen's speech. Because many of the questions asked by the Taiwan Thinktank seemed worded to elicit responses endorsing pan-Green political positions regardless of the respondent's political preference, the results of their poll appear biased. Nonetheless, on some questions, a divergence in views along party lines similar to the other polls is apparent. For example, in response to a question on whether the government should strengthen or relax restrictions on Taiwan investment in the Mainland, 45 percent of KMT supporters say restrictions should be relaxed and 40 percent favor strengthening restrictions, while only 17 percent of DPP supporters favor greater relaxation and 75 percent want to strengthen restrictions.

Comment

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¶6. (C) Polling by Taiwan organizations is often skewed, both because of political bias and for technical reasons, but is nonetheless suggestive of major trends. What the polls considered here seem to indicate is that, although President Chen's approval rating remains dangerously low, he has regained the approval of a key segment within the DPP, offsetting the trend of growing criticism and rejection of him from within the party that followed the disastrous setback for the DPP in the December 3 local elections, but inviting disaffection from others in the DPP. Chen has tacked toward the independence fundamentalists, and they are endorsing him for espousing their causes. Some members of the reform-minded New Tide faction of the DPP, however, are criticizing President Chen for tightening cross-Straits relations, provoking confrontation with the opposition over the sensitive issue of a new constitution, and deciding major changes in policy direction without intra-party deliberation.

¶7. (C) The divergence of views on cross-Straits economic relations along party lines may reflect a battle of perceptions. Pan-Blue supporters generally perceive China's rapid growth to be an opportunity for Taiwan. They see the island's future prosperity as dependent on taking advantage of the Mainland's cheap labor and relatively abundant land. To pan-Blue supporters, Taiwan's geographic proximity and close cultural ties with the Mainland are a source of strength. These perceptions are often reinforced by other non-economic factors such as ethnicity. Conversely, many pan-Green supporters tend to see China's economic rise as a threat to their own economic security and hopes for independence. To them, Taiwan's investment in the PRC means a net loss of jobs for Taiwan. They fear competition from cheap PRC imports and the Mainland's abundant human resources. Their fears are bolstered by doubts about the reliability of the KMT's commitment to Taiwan's interests, as they understand them.

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